

Organizational Structure of the *Thomasschule* in Leipzig

The City Council's Involvement in School Affairs

The ultimate authority regarding all matters concerning the students who attended the *Thomasschule* in Leipzig in 1723 was vested in the executive committee of the Leipzig City Council. The government of the City of Leipzig in 1723 was tricameral with one acting (continually active) executive committee consisting of the “elders” having the last word in all matters concerning the *Thomasschule* and two “non-sitting” committees which are only occasionally called into activity for major decision-making. Only one of the latter two committees is directly concerned with school matters. For each of the two major schools in Leipzig, the *Nikolai-* and *Thomasschule*, separate school supervisors (*Vorsteher*) were assigned to look into the daily activities of each school and to be available for consultation and to approve or not approve more serious matters as they occur or refer them back to the executive committee for a final decision. The supervisors' role is both to serve as a liaison between the school and city hall and to provide a temporary proxy as needed when important decisions need to be made quickly.

In 1723, the school supervisor for the *Thomasschule* was one of members (*Rathsherr* = alderman, city council member) of one of the ‘non-sitting’ city council committees, Gottfried Conrad Lehmann (born March 2, 1661 in Weißenfels, died December 22, 1728 in Leipzig), who had been selected to serve as an alderman in the Leipzig City Council in 1706 and was the school supervisor when Bach became cantor in 1723. *Bach-Dokumente*, Vol. 2, item 265, p. 195, “City Council Decision Regarding the Distribution of Money from the Dr. Philipp Trust Fund”, Leipzig, December 3, 1729, Lehmann is referred to as the former school supervisor (*der ehemahliger Vorsteher*) of the *Thomasschule*.

The specific duties of the school supervisor are indicated sporadically throughout the *Schulordnung*. On p. 37 of the latter document there is even mention of church supervisors for *Nikolai-* and *Thomaskirche*. These are obviously not the same individuals who serve as school supervisors for the attached schools. As cantor, Bach is required to report to each of them on the musical abilities of the organist and any of the “other musicians” who perform in these churches.

Here are the references to the school supervisor for the *Thomasschule* as contained in the *Schulordnung* of 1723:

p. 4: No changes can be made to either the monthly faculty meeting minutes or the records kept of the twice yearly examinations without his (the school **supervisor's**) prior knowledge and permission

p. 8: The librarian must submit to him (the school **supervisor**) a list of books that are being considered for purchase

p. 9: A student in the infirmary is not allowed to have another boy stay with him overnight without the permission of the principal and the school **supervisor**; the infirmary may not be opened (unlocked) without the permission of the school **supervisor** unless it is an emergency in which case the principal may allow the sick or injured student to be brought to the 'sick room', but must, at the same time notify the school **supervisor**; twice yearly the principal must present to the school **supervisor** for inspection the ledgers wherein the monies have been recorded, monies which have been collected from the carolers (*Currende*) and weekly from the prefects

p. 16: Any disputes between teachers which cannot be resolved among themselves should be brought before the principal and if the latter is not immediately available to the school **supervisor** or to the city council members and its inspectors

p. 17: If any teacher, for unavoidable reasons, must leave Leipzig, he must always report this absence to the acting mayor and the school **supervisor**

p. 18: serious disciplinary matters involving student behavior and actions should be resolved among the teachers together with the principal – if, however, the punishment involves expelling the student from the school or depriving him of any benefits normally accorded a student, it may not be undertaken without the foreknowledge and permission of the school **supervisor**

p. 26: When the twice yearly examinations are given, members of the city council, along with the school **supervisor**, will be deputized and represent the city council as a whole

p. 36: The cantor must present to the school **supervisor** for his inspection an inventory accounting for all music books, parts, manuscripts, instruments (such as those used by the city pipers), etc., that have been purchased for the school from school funds

p. 38: Neither the principal nor the cantor are allowed to accept a new student or expel an already enrolled student without prior knowledge and permission of the school **supervisor**; they may not favor any student, especially external students, with a special position or higher rank, or with benefits, and money without presenting these cases to the school **supervisor**; any new students coming from outside of Leipzig and applying for admission must be reported to the school **supervisor** immediately and, if they have met the necessary qualifications through testing by the principal, they cannot be officially enrolled without the express permission of the school **supervisor**;

the same holds true when an external student applies for a vacant position as an internal (*Alumnus*) student

p. 40: A boy with a soprano voice who has been successfully singing soprano for 5 or 6 years may not continue in this capacity and as a *Thomaner* beyond this point without the consent of the school **supervisor** who will annually decide each year thereafter if the student may continue as a *Thomaner*

p. 41: A student may not be expelled without the prior knowledge and permission of the school **supervisor** – the **supervisor** must then bring the matter before the city council; only the city council can decide whether the student may stay or must be expelled.

p. 49: The principal and the school **supervisor** have control over the sealed money box in which the monies from funerals is collected

p. 54: The school **supervisor** must be present at the division and distribution of monies collected from the various singing activities

p. 55: The school **supervisor** has the only key to one of the two locks for the sealed money box (the principal has the other one and keeps the box in his study); the school **supervisor** must be present when the monthly distribution of money is made to each student and checks the written account for its correctness

p. 56: There is another similar money box (where both the principal and school **supervisor** must be present) for the 4 teachers of the lower classes – every month a distribution is made to these teachers from this box

p. 61: Only the principal together with the school **supervisor** can decide whether the boys may leave the church services during communion without waiting until the end of the service

p. 67: If a student is absent from school for more than 8 days without a very important reason or excuse, the school **supervisor** must receive prior knowledge and agree with the punishment meted out

p. 69: If a student secretly runs away overnight the principal must immediately report this to the school **supervisor** so that he can immediately notify the city council – the council members will then initiate a search and capture mission and mete out the appropriate punishment

p. 73: If a student has been absent from a choir for a month, his name will be stricken from the list of carolers with the prior knowledge of the school **supervisor**

p. 74: The cantor selects his own prefects (choir director assistants) but must present (introduce) them to the school **supervisor**

p. 77: The “General Prefect” can be appointed to this office, but with the prior knowledge of the school **supervisor**

p. 78: The school **supervisor** must have prior knowledge of and have given his permission for the cantor's appointment of the choir prefects

p. 80: The school **supervisor** can appoint his own assistant (*Famulus*) to collect dues from the students

p. 81: The *Calefactor* can be appointed by the principal, but the city council and school **supervisor** must have received prior knowledge of this appointment and have approved it.

p. 82: The janitor (*Purgant*) can be appointed by the principal, but the city council and school **supervisor** must have received prior knowledge of this appointment and have approved it; any student holding a special position or office within the school may be removed from this position, but not without the prior knowledge and consent of the school **supervisor**

The Role of the Church in School Affairs

A *superintendent* is a pastor who has been elevated to function as an overseer for churches in a given region, in this case all the churches as well as the schools affiliated with them within the Leipzig region including those located in and around Leipzig.

The first reference in the *Schulordnung* to the *superintendent* is on pp. 2 and 3 where he joined the Leipzig City Council for a very important school inspection which preceded its publication. His role here appears to be that of an advisor: “we [the members of the Leipzig City Council] have conferred with the Superintendent of Churches and Schools in Leipzig...”

For the important semester examinations of all the students, the *superintendent* is “invited so that they [the pastor of the *Thomaskirche* and he] can ascertain and report back to us [the Leipzig City Council] the accomplishments of the students as well as the industry of the teachers.” (p. 26)

Finally, on p. 39, the *superintendent* is called upon to function as an inspector along with the city council to prevent the cantor from simply eliminating a *Thomaner* who is “unable to perform any music because he does not have a good voice or because he did not want to learn music.” In such a case the superintendent and city council will set a specific time limit to give the boy a final opportunity to improve and attain proficiency before he is forced to resign and make room for another boy to take over his position.

The *pastor* at the *Thomaskirche* is mentioned in each of the same instances cited above for the *superintendent*.

A *Diakon* (deacon = assistant pastor) is mentioned only once on p. 43 where a *Thomaner* (*Alumnus*) is selected by the deacon to carry the money from funerals that is destined for the administration.

Although not specifically documented in the *Schulordnung*, there also were *Kirchen=Vorsteher* for at least both of the two main churches and perhaps also for the others as well. These church supervisors were not representatives of the city council but rather served as proxies for the Leipzig Consistory (*Konsistorium*), an independent church governmental organization which had powers over which the city council had little or no control. Indeed, there were often direct conflicts and confrontations between both city and church governments. Church matters which were not resolved at the local level could be appealed to the *Oberkonsistorium* (supreme consistory) located in Dresden where, together with the Elector of Saxony, a final decision could be reached, one which the Leipzig City Council might contest, but also one which it might have to accept.

The Cantor and His Assistants in Church and School

In order for the cantor to fulfill the many duties that are assigned to him in the *Schulordnung*, provisions have been made to relieve him of certain responsibilities. For this purpose certain colleagues and mature students who receive remuneration for their efforts are selected by the cantor with the approval of the principal and supervisor.

Not mentioned specifically in the *Schulordnung* but documented in the negotiations between Bach and the city council is the arrangement that Bach would be relieved from teaching Latin classes at the school by paying another faculty member to teach these classes for him.

Mentioned in the *Schulordnung* on pages 53 and 54 are 8 *concentors*. This term, already antiquated, in Bach's time but still occasionally being used belongs in the category of others like *praecantor*, *succentor*, *vicesuccentor* and even *Concentos musicos* (p. 36) often seen elsewhere as *Concentus musicus*. Basically the Latin stem or root *-cent-* is related to the root *cant-* which is found in *cantor*, *cantorey*, all of these words originating from the Latin verb *cantare* = to sing. *Concentos/Concentus* is defined in German as "ein

stimmendes Zusammensingen” = “a several voices that sing together harmoniously with good balance and in tune”. A *cantor* in German churches after the Reformation is a master in teaching singing (*Sangmeister*) to students in the local parochial schools and directing figural music in church and school. The *Concentos musicos* is the name for a student choral group. A synonym for this in the *Schulordnung* would be *Cantorey*. The ‘first *cantorey*’ is Bach’s primary singing group or choir. There are 4 *cantoreys* mentioned both in Bach’s *Entwurff* and the *Schulordnung*. A *Coetus* can refer to any specific group of students, but in reality this most often refers to a choral group in the *Thomasschule* environment where most students attending the school are either selected to be members of such groups or else are waiting for an opportunity to be accepted as such. The *Currende* (caroling groups) consist of groups students with varying abilities. Since the *cantor* at the *Thomasschule* is also responsible for providing choral music at 3 other Leipzig churches besides the *Thomaskirche*, churches where services are taking place simultaneously on Sunday mornings, it becomes absolutely necessary for other individuals with sufficient musical training to assist the cantor in these tasks. A *succentor* (the prefix *suc-* is actually *sub-*) is a “sub” or substitute *cantor*. This term, *succentor*, does not appear in the *Schulordnung* but was frequently used in the late 16th and throughout the 17th century. Instead there is the term *Præfecti Chororum*, which is used to distinguish this type of *præfect* from others like the 8 *Præfecti-Cubicolorum* whose main task was to watch over the *Alumni* at night. A *præcentor* (p. 34) or “lead singer or *Vorsinger*” is generally one who sings with a loud, clear voice and begins singing the chorale during church services so that the congregation will follow his lead and join in. The *præcentor* may replace a *præfect* when the circumstances call for someone to substitute for the assistant conductor. The *præcentor* is also responsible for teaching chorale singing to all the other boys not in the primary choir.

As stated above, the most difficult to identify correctly is *concentor*. The *Schulordnung* only indicates that there are 8 *concentors* who also receive certain sums of monies that have been collected from singing activities in which they have participated with others. For a proper definition of *concentor*, it is necessary to consult Michael Praetorius’ definition contained in his *Syntagma musicam* printed in 1619: “a *concentor* is one who sings the *concertato* (solo) parts”. It would appear from this that the *concentors* in Bach’s choirs could be the two quartets of 4 soloists (SATB) one quartet for both the primary and secondary choirs. These soloists very likely functioned as section leaders in these choirs.

Since the correct definition of *concentor* is very important here, the complete source will be listed here directly rather than in a footnote.

This reference appears in the book with the following title page:

Michael Praetorius

Syntagma musicum

Dritter Theil

Dieses

TOMI TERTII

Χειραγωγία

Gedruckt zu Wolffenbüttel...Im Jahr 1619

(Wolffenbüttel, 1619)

Chapter VI *De Basso Generalisen Continuo* **Wie der GeneralBaß/...** p. 145 (or more correctly as the case may be when Praetorius' suggested correction in the erroneous numbering of the pages is taken into account: p. 125) [Careful readers will note that they are immediately confronted with what appears on the surface to be a different spelling of the word to be defined: *Concertori* instead of *Concentori*. It is very likely that printer and his assistants were confused by Praetorius use of the terms, *ConcertatStimmen* and *Concentori*, thus they incorrectly substituted an “r” for an “n” in this single instance quoted in the first sentence below. Praetorius explains at the end of the book that he regretted being absent during the time when most of the typesetting took place. As a result a much greater number of irreparable errors than he had anticipated had already been committed so that a long list of errata was not considered worth the effort and cost.]

“Sondern auch von dem Cantori, Concertori [Concentori] oder Sanger...gesagt vnd etwas erklaret werden.”

p. 125: **Das I. Stuck. Was ein Organist vor Eigenschafften an sich haben solle.**

p. 126: AA. 3. **So [er] mu er ein gut vnd Subtil Ohr vnd Gehor haben/ damit er im zusammen stimmen/wenn der Gesang mit einander fortgehet/ dem Concentori, das ist/ deme der die Concertat Stimmen singet/ nach vnd zuzugeben wisse.”**

[Transliteration]: Sondern auch von dem *Cantori*, *Concertori* [*Concentori*] oder Sanger...gesagt vnd etwas erklaret warden. Das 1. Stuck. Was ein Organist vor Eigenschafften an sich haben solle. So [er] mu er ein gut und *Subtil* Ohr vnd Gehor haben, damit er im zusammen stimmen, wenn der Gesang mit

einander fortgehet, dem *Concentori*, das ist, dem der die *Concertat* Stimmen singet, nach und zuzugeben wisse.

[Modern German]: Sondern auch von dem Kantor, den *Concentoren* oder Sängern [soll hier] etwas gesagt und erklärt werden. Das 1. Stück. Was ein Organist für Eigenschaften an sich haben soll. So muß er ein gutes und subtiles Ohr und Gehör haben, damit er im Zusammenstimmen, wenn der Gesang miteinander fortgeht, dem *Concentor*, das ist, dem, der die *Concertat* Stimmen singt, nach- und zuzugeben weiß.

[Possible English Translation]: But also something will be said and explained about the *Cantor*, *Concentors* or singers. The first section. The type of traits an organist should possess. So it is that he [the organist] must have a good ear to detect subtleties so that he will know how to accompany the vocal soloist through adjusting his playing by giving into or pressing forward as needed so as to achieve harmony as the music progresses. [In the midst of this sentence, the word *concentor* is defined as one who sings the *concertato* (solo) parts.]

Das II. Stück

Wie ein Organist einen jeden Gesang und Concert Schlagen und tractiren solle.

p. 137

L. V. I. Wil er aber mit der rechten Hand einige Geschwindigkeit oder Bewegung als nemblich in lieblichen Cadentien oder sonst lieblichen Clausulen gebrauchen/ so muß es mit sonderbahrer Maß und Bescheidenheit geschehen / damit die Concentores in ihrem intent nicht impediret und confundiret, oder ihre Stimme dadurch obtundiret und vnterdrücken werde.

[Transliteration]: Das II. Stück. Wie ein Organist einen jeden Gesang und Concert Schlagen und tractiren solle. Wil er aber mit der rechten Hand einige Geschwindigkeit oder Bewegung als nemblich in lieblichen **Cadentien** oder sonst lieblichen **Clausulen** gebrauchen/ so muß es mit sonderbahrer Maß und Bescheidenheit geschehen / damit die **Concentores** in ihrem **intent** nicht **impediret** und **confundiret**, oder ihre Stimme dadurch **obtundiret** und vnterdrücken werde.

[Modern German]: Das II. Stück. Wie ein Organist jeden Gesang und jedes Ensemble dirigieren und aufführen soll. Will er [der dirigierende Organist] aber mit der rechten Hand etwas Geschwindigkeit oder Bewegung nämlich wie bei den lieblichen Kadenzen oder sonst auch beim lieblichen Schlußfall gebrauchen, so muß es mit sonderbarer Maß und Bescheidenheit geschehen, damit die *Concentoren* in ihrer Absicht oder Vorhaben nicht verhindert und verwirrt oder ihre Stimme dadurch unklar und unterdrückt werde.

[Possible English Translation]: The second section. How an organist should direct and perform every chorale (or religious song) and any kind of ensemble. However, if he [the organist who conducts an ensemble] wants to increase the tempo or get things moving a bit, or to be more precise, as it often happens during the sweet-sounding cadenzas or also in the final cadences, then he will need to do this

with a considerable amount of measured care and restraint so that the vocal soloists are not hindered or confused in attaining what they have in mind or that their voices become indistinct and are drowned out by this action.

The Student Body with Its Various Divisions

As can be determined from school records of the *Thomasschule* during Bach's tenure there, the students, or boys, who were accepted as *Thomaner* at the earliest possible age (from 12 to 14 years of age), generally remained at the school for about 7 to 8 years, corresponding to the 7 levels/classes mentioned in the *Schulordnung*, and graduated from the school at the age of 20 to 22 years old.¹ Although no students are recorded that began school here at less than 12 years of age, there are a number of instances when a student became an internal student later than the average but also remained longer to complete his education. An extreme example is that of Paul Christian Stolle who was born in 1706 and attended the *Thomasschule* as an *Internus* from 1722-1733, thus he was officially a *Thomaner* from age 16 to 27. A much more typical example is that of Johann Ludwig Krebs, born in 1713, who was a *Thomaner* (*Internus*) from 1726-1735. This later famous composer began his studies at age 13 and graduated from the *Thomasschule* 7 years later at 22 years of age. Sometimes, but not very often, a gifted *Thomaner* during his consecutive attendance at the *Thomasschule* would be allowed to skip one level and be placed into the next higher one, thus completing his entire course of studies in less than the 7 years normally required of each *Thomaner* to attain a successful graduation from the school.

Throughout the text, the *Thomaner* are referred to variously as *die Jugend* (the "youths" or "young people" generally), *Knabe* or *Schul=Knabe* ("boys" or "schoolboys"), *Schüler* ("pupil" [German distinguishes between *Schüler* {those attending classes from grade school through high school} and *Studiosi* or *Studenten* {students attending the university}); however, in this English translation of the *Schulordnung*, "student" is used to refer to both types of learners]), and even *Discipulis*.

The students are divided into *Classes* of which there are those in the lower (*Inferiores*) and upper (*Superiores*) classes. Those in the very lowest class of beginners are called

¹ The list of teachers for each of the 7 levels/classes taught at the *Thomasschule* is given on pp. 11-12 of the *Schulordnung*. It is thus difficult to understand Christoph Wolff's contention that the *Thomaner* during Bach's tenure in Leipzig began their schooling as *Alumni* at approximately the age of 12 or 13 and spent on an average two years at each level beginning with *Quartus* and moving to the top level *Prima* during the course of their usual 8 years that they attended the school.

Incipienti, or *Inquilini*. Students of each class level are referred to by Latin ordinal numbers: *Primani*, *Secundani*, etc. (the first, highest level of the oldest students, the second level, etc.) or *Primaner*, *Secundaner*, *Tertianer*, *Quartaner*, *Quintaner*, *Sextaner* and *Septaner*. The school is divided into two main types of students: those who board at the school (*Alumni*, *Interni*) and those who only attend classes during the day (*Externi*). The latter are waiting for openings in the former group to occur. Some external students never get accepted as *Alumni*.

As already indicated in the section on the cantor, the older and/or more talented boys had numerous opportunities to take on positions of authority over the other boys: *Præfects*, *Præcentors*, and *Concentors* were chosen by the cantor to assist him in his musical obligations. There were, however, others who had supervisory duties pertaining to hallway, dormitory, and cafeteria duties as well as direct classroom management or assistance for teachers. Such positions involved extra remuneration for duties and responsibilities that pertained to the specific positions for which they have been selected. These could range from supervising students in- and outside of the classroom or simply providing materials such as canes for the teacher or firewood and candles for all the rooms in the school building.

The Faculty with Its Various Duties and Responsibilities

The *Præceptors*' (teachers') duties are described in Chapter II and elsewhere in the *Schulordnung*. They are referred to by Latin ordinal numbers indicating the class-level which they teach: *Primus* (*Rector* = Principal), the highest level of students who are preparing to graduate, *Secundus* (*Conrector* = Assistant Principal), *Tertius*, *Quartus*, *Quintus*, *Sextus* and *Septimus*. Collectively, they and the *Cantor* are referred to as *Collegae* (the singular Latin form is *collega*, which in English is *colleague* or in modern German: *der Kollege*, pl. *die Kollegen*) or *Commilitoni* (modern German: *der Kommilitone*, pl. *die Kommilitonen*). The title, *Collaborator*, referring to either the *Sextus* or *Septimus*, was officially dropped at the time of the publication of the new *Schulordnung* in 1723.